NATIONAL COUNCIL
for
HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

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EXECUTIVE OFFICES

SPECIAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 1949

THE NATIONAL TRUST

On Wednesday, October 26, the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States was created when President Truman signed H. R. 5170. Because of the number of bills that the President had to sign in the wake of the adjournment of Congress, there was no formal signing ceremony. Public announcement of the event was delayed almost a week.

The establishment of the National Trust as a Congressionally-chartered organization in less than a year's time after the Executive Board of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings was empowered by the membership at the 1948 Annual Meeting to work toward that end is a major accomplishment. It could not have been achieved without the cooperation of many agencies, organizations, and individuals.

It is unnecessary to review again the various steps taken in the evolution from the idea to an Act of Congress. It is more important to summarize briefly the provisions of H. R. 5170 so that members will know what are the responsibilities of the National Council with regard to the National Trust.

It seems many have already inferred that the National Trust will serve merely as a holding corporation for historic properties, whereas your Committee on the Organization of the National Trust carefully stated that the primary purpose was preservation of selected sites and structures significant in American history and culture. By "preservation" it meant a full-rounded program of scientific study, protection, restoration, maintenance, and interpretation. The Committee further noted that there were two complementary methods for accomplishing this purpose: "first, to arrange for the preservation and interpretation of historic properties by whatever practicable methods may come to hand; and second, to acquire and hold properties so that they may be preserved and interpreted."

Several other possible misconceptions should also be dispelled. The National Trust is not a Government agency: it is a Congressionally chartered private corporation, like the American Red Cross. The National Trust will not be supported by Government funds (no appropriation was authorized by H. R. 5170): it will be wholly dependent on private support. The National Trust will not have members: the National Council will continue to have various classes of membership for both individuals and organizations.

H. R. 5170 states that a National Trust is necessary in order to facilitate, or encourage, public participation in preservation. The National Trust so established is a charitable, educational and non-profit organization with power to receive donations of significant sites, buildings, and objects, to preserve and administer them for public

the beginning. The National Trust and the National Council, which are interdependent, cannot succeed without the continued cooperation of the loyal membership that brought to fruition these organizations as they stand today. Moreover, the time has come for renewed effort to broaden the base of both operation and support.

There is a challenge inherent in the creation of the National Trust. The true unification of the forces for preservation in this country will be marked from October 26, 1949, if the potential in both the National Council and the National Trust is realized in years to come. And that is a job for all Americans who realize the worth of their American heritage.

You are especially requested to send in to the National Council before November 30th your suggestions as to persons you think well qualified to be trustees of the National Trust.

A. S. Pearson

President
National Council for
Historic Sites and Buildings